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AWAKE, SLEEPER!

— Augmented Edition —

(Part One)



HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON

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Preface

The collection of articles in this pamphlet was prepared as a response to a pastoral question: can the non-Orthodox be saved?

This question was originally posed to Metropolitan Ephraim by the son of one of our clergymen. The only way the Metropolitan could answer this question was to turn to our Orthodox Christian sources: our hymnology, the writings of the Church Fathers and the Lives of the Saints.

In fact, there are no non-Orthodox Christians in Paradise, but the answer several Church Fathers give may surprise many, but not those who are more familiar with our Orthodox Christian literature.

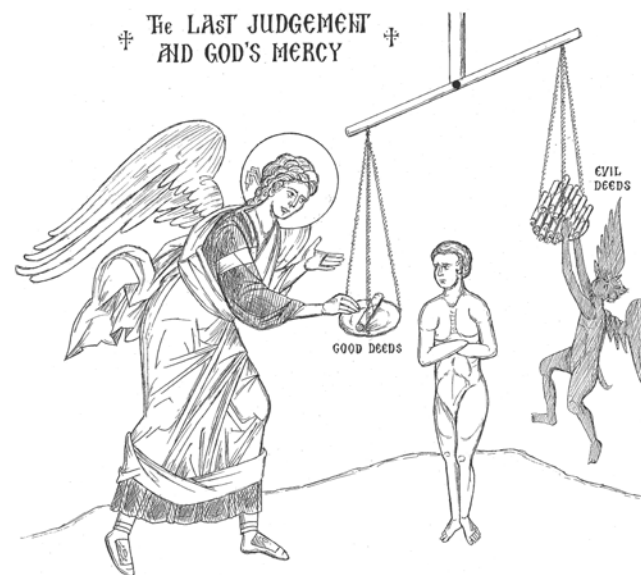
Metropolitan Ephraim's Response to Fr. Michael

Dear Father Michael:

Bravo!

In Christ,

+Ephraim metropolitan



+ Based on frescoes at the monasteries in Meteora, the Holy Mountain and Serbia.

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Therefore, taking into account all that we have said above — even if one does not understand or believe that Christ’s descent into Hades to preach was outside the bounds of earthly time, as also is the soul when it is separated from the body — yet, one thing is certain and undeniable: Holy Scripture proclaims that all the dead of all ages past will stand before the Righteous Judge, all will see and know the Merciful Christ, to be judged only then and finally at the end of time, when the supplications and intercessions of the Church will cease.

Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall stand; for God is able to make him stand.

(Rom. 14:4)



From a Letter of Fr. Michael Azkoul to Metropolitan Ephraim

Dear Vladika,

This is my *theologoumenon*: If we confess that [the Orthodox Church] is the Church of Christ, then, there can be no salvation beyond her canonical and doctrinal precincts. In other words, whoever enters the Kingdom of Heaven must be a member of the Orthodox Church.

Here is the “catch”: if God, in His mercy, saves anyone else, He makes them a member of His Body. The RC or Protestant or Moslem or Jew or Bhuddist, Hindu—they become Orthodox and, consequently, are welcomed into His Kingdom.

The members of the Church should pray for all souls that pass from this world. Our fate is always in the Hands of God.

Fr. Michael

AWAKE, SLEEPER!

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

After reading the short article, “Will the Heterodox Be Saved?”* by St. Philaret of New York, I felt that the Saint had hit the nail on the head. In a few words, he said what needed to be said. I could only wish I had the same gift.

Being prone to somewhat long-winded explanations, I started thinking about some things that I’ve read and heard during our monastic vigils and at the readings during our monastery meals, and I thought that others might want to hear them also, since they reinforce what Saint Philaret had to say in the above-mentioned article.

Essentially, what Saint Philaret (and the Church Fathers) say is that, in order to judge mankind fairly, our Saviour will give every person who ever lived on earth the opportunity to espouse or reject His teaching. Whether this happens while the person is still living or in Hades — *whenever* it happens — he or she will have the opportunity to make that choice.

This is what the Holy Scriptures and our Holy Tradition teach us (see our previous article, “Sheol Delenda Est!”). Whether all choose to believe and accept that message is a question we cannot answer, of course. But, in general, the Saints of the Church are generally optimistic about the success of the Christian message.

Let us suppose the following scenario:

If a Methodist’s *only* encounter with the Orthodox Christian Faith is the *ecumenistic* version he hears at the Near East Festival held by the local new calendar “Orthodox” parish, has that Methodist actually encountered the *true* Orthodox Faith? So, suppose he dies the next day. Will our Saviour judge him as one who has encountered Orthodoxy and rejected it (together with the gambling and the

* Orthodox Life, Vol. 34, No. 6, Nov. – Dec. 1984, pp. 33-35. Reprints are available from the Holy Metropolis of Boston.

belly dancer)? Or rather, will our Saviour say to him: “What you saw at the ecumenistic church was not the real McCoy. *Here* is what the Orthodox Christian Faith is actually all about. Now, do you accept it or reject it?”

At that point, the person whom we know to have died as a Methodist might well exclaim, “My word! So *that’s* what the Orthodox Christian Faith really believes! Well, of course, I do accept and espouse it. What I saw when I was still living on earth was a parody, so, of course, I rejected it, but this is completely different! Yes! I accept it with my whole heart!”

Now, in the eyes of men, this man appears to have died after having rejected Orthodox Christianity. But is this actually the case?

According to the teaching of the New Testament (I Peter 3:18-20), our Saviour preached to those spirits in Hades “who formerly had not obeyed....”

So now, the person whom we, the living, saw departing this life as one who had “rejected” the Orthodox Christian Faith might actually be in the bosom of the Father, thanks to his acceptance of our Saviour’s preaching.

But wait. Did not our Saviour Himself say: “Amen, amen, I say unto you: Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God” (John 3:5), and also, “Amen, amen, I say unto you: Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you” (John 6:53)?

Our Saviour Himself is telling us unequivocally that we must be baptized in order to enter the Kingdom of God, and that we must partake of His Body and Blood in order to have life in ourselves. These Holy Mysteries are found only in the One True Church.

What now? What does this mean for those who were *not* baptized and did *not* partake of the Holy Mysteries in this life?

Will all receive the same reward — both those who lived and struggled in the Orthodox Christian Faith during their life, and

opportunity to accept or reject Christ when He descended into Hades, we have sought to demonstrate in many articles that the Lives of the Saints, the writings of many Church Fathers and the hymnology of our Church accord the same possibility (if not probability) to those who came *after* Christ. Both groups lived and died without knowing about Christ and, thus were never given the chance to accept or reject Him. What is so special about the “B. C.” group, which is given a choice, as opposed to the “A. D.” group, which is *not*?

Our Saviour’s descent into Hades and His preaching there are dogmas of the Church. The Holy Fathers, as we mentioned earlier, have *no* consensus about who did or did not follow Him into Paradise. This lack of consensus makes this particular point a *theologoumenon* (a teaching that has *not* been defined as a dogma). But we have quoted abundantly from many Orthodox Christian sources to shed light on this question so that everyone can draw his own conclusions about this matter.

Back to Hawaii

So, as we have seen in the texts we quoted earlier, according to Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Saint Romanus the Melodist and Saint John of Damascus, not just the righteous of the Old Testament, but even the Hawaiians who lived centuries “after” our Saviour’s descent into Hades could be accounted worthy to hear our Saviour’s preaching and be given their *first* opportunity to accept or reject His teaching and thereby accept or reject salvation.

No “second” opportunities. Not even if you live in Hawaii (although Saint John of Damascus is willing to give the benefit of the doubt to people who did not “grasp” the Christian message when they were living; and Saint Amphilochius of Iconium is willing to go even further than that).

Only God knows who has heard His *true* message of salvation!

It says in the Gospel, “They that have done good shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil shall come forth unto the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29). Who are they that have done good, and who are they that have done evil? This is a question only God can answer. How do we know whether even a fierce persecutor of the Christians, like the Roman emperor Trajan, might at some point in his life felt a profound grief and wept over the fact that his own daughter — who had become a Christian — had suffered martyrdom at his orders? In fact, we do not know. Only God knows.

Certainly, after death, there is no change in man’s character. But here we are speaking specifically about those who had *never* heard the Gospel of Christ during their lives. Christ’s resurrection freed all these dead also, giving them a chance to make a choice — according to the character and virtues they had cultivated *in life*, according to their consciences as people who “have not the Law, but by nature do the things contained in the Law” (Rom. 2:14). This would be their opportunity, they would have the choice, at last, to express their remorse over their former idolatry and believe in and accept the true God, Christ, Who, until that moment, had been for them “the Unknown God.”

The doctrine that there is no conversion in Hades for the dead pagans who had never seen or heard of Christ in their lifetime was promulgated, in fact, in Spain, at the Council of Toledo in A. D. 625. This was confirmed at the Council of Toledo in A. D. 633 — *the very Council that also added the filioque to the Creed!*

These unhappy developments in the West are due to the baneful influence of the teachings of Augustine of Hippo, according to whom the vast majority of mankind is — thanks to its inherited guilt — *predestined* to eternal damnation.

Whereas it is a teaching of the Church that those outside the household of the believers who came *before* Christ were given the

those who believed only later?

As usual, we must turn to our Saviour and the Saints for the answers.

You will notice that in our translation of the Lord’s Prayer, we do not say, “Our Father, Who art in Heaven,” as everyone else does. Instead we say, “Who art in the Heavens.” Elsewhere, in the Beatitudes, we say: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of the Heavens,” “Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of the Heavens,” and also “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in the Heavens.” There is a very important reason for these differences. First of all, the Greek word for “Heavens” is in the plural (See St. Basil, *Hexaemeron*, III:3). Furthermore, our Saviour tells us, “In my Father’s house, there are many mansions. Were it not so, I should have told you, because I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

The Church Fathers teach that there are *many* degrees, *many* levels of His saving grace, that are given to each according to his worth. Each one will partake of God’s glory according to his level of love for God and man, his devotion, faithfulness, purity, struggles for the Faith, etc. That, also, is why Saint Paul can speak of his being taken up to the “third Heaven” (II Cor. 12:2). In his First Epistle to the Corinthians (chap. 15), Saint Paul writes about the resurrection from the dead, and at one point, he says:

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So is it also with the resurrection of the dead.

Likewise, one saint differs from another in glory.

One valuable source for much of this information is our hymnology. However, there is one problem with our sacred hymnographers: they were too prolific! Saint Romanos the Melodist and Saint

John of Damascus, for example, wrote so many hymns, our service books cannot contain them all.

Another prolific hymnographer was Saint Ephraim the Syrian. In his *Hymns on Paradise*, written in the Syriac language, we find many insights into the state of the souls in the other life. Here are some of the Saint's inspired thoughts about the different "levels" and degrees that we are speaking about:

When Adam sinned, God drove him from Paradise.
But by His goodness He gave him a lower place outside her
boundary;
He permitted him to make his dwelling at the foot of
Paradise.
But because men continued to sin, they were driven from
there;
Because they were no longer worthy to be neighbours to
Paradise God commanded the ark to cast them out upon
Mount Ararat.

(*Hymn One*, stanza 10)

I saw there also the arbours of the righteous,
Dripping with spikenard, wafting forth fragrances,
Garnished with fruits, crowned with blossoms.
As the toil of each man, so also his labour:
One impoverished in its adornment, another radiant in its
beauty;
One faint in its colours, another dazzling in its glory.
Blessed is he that is worthy to inherit Thy Paradise!

(*Hymn Five*, stanza 6)

There the eye of the spirit can behold in their beauty
The desirable abodes of the righteous, who invite us
To be their brethren, their companions, their members.
O, my brethren, if only we should not be separated from
their company!

but also those who *in the future* will be sent
to you will arise. .

(*Kontakion 45*, Sources chrétiennes 128, 594)

According to the *Octoëchos* (composed by Saint John of Damascus), Christ "descended even unto Hades and dispelled the darkness there, and hast shown the light of the Resurrection *unto the nations*" (verses for "Lord, I have Cried," Plagal of First Tone).*

Then, also in the *Octoëchos*, we find the following:

Unto Him Who abolished death's dominion, and Who rose
in glory from the grave, *saving the race of men*, give praise, O
ye priests...

(Ode 8 of Sunday Matins, Grave Tone)

And also:

Having raised up all the dead out of the dark abysses by His
life-bestowing hand, Christ God, the Giver of life, hath
bestowed the Resurrection upon mortal nature; for He is the
Saviour and Resurrection and Life of all, and the God of all.

(Kontakion of Sunday Matins, Pl. of 2nd Tone)

A Quick Trip to Spain

Indeed, it would be rather odd if we were to believe that our Saviour descended into Hades and aroused the sleeping, dead pagans — *who had never seen or heard of Him before this* — only to proclaim to them: "Rejoice! Clap your hands, all ye nations! I bring you tidings of great joy! You're all damned eternally!!"

So far, we must admit that we have not detected this cynical teaching in the Church's joyous and triumphant hymnology for the Resurrection of Christ.

*In the Christian context, the Greek word used here, *ethnê*, can mean "nations," "pagans," "pagan nations," or "heathen." This shift in the word's meaning came into the Greek language from the influence of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

God. Only God is the One Who understands and can judge everything as only He knows.

(par. 73-4)

Saint John Chrysostom, in his “Homily on the Cemetery and the Cross,” writes:

So Christ, by His death, bound the chief of robbers and the jailer, that is, the devil and death, *and transferred their treasures, that is, the entire human race*, to the royal treasury. . . The King Himself came to the prisoners. . .

(*Homily on the Cemetery and the Cross*,
PG 49:395-396)

The “entire human race”? Even the Hawaiians?

How about the Hawaiians who lived many centuries later? This is what Saint Cyril of Alexandria says about *them*:

Death, unwilling to be defeated, is defeated; corruption is transformed; unconquerable passion is destroyed. While Hades, diseased with excessive insatiability and never satisfied with the dead, is taught, even if against its will, that which it could not learn previously. ***For it not only ceases to claim those who are still to fall [in the future], but also sets free those already captured, being subjected to splendid devastation by the power of our Saviour.*** . . Having preached to the spirits in Hades, once disobedient, He came out as conqueror by resurrecting His temple as the beginning of our hope and by showing to [our] nature the manner of the raising from the dead, and giving us along with it other blessings as well.

(*Fifth Festive Letter*, PG 77:473)

Saint Romanus the Melodist says the same thing:

Not only will you, [O Hades,] give back
those whom you have taken and whom I have resurrected
and now take with Me, as I leave here,

O, if we could be their kindred, or at least their neighbours:
If not within their dwellings, then at least round about their
arbours!

Blest is He, Who by His Cross, opened the door of
Paradise!

(*Hymn Six*, stanza 16)

May my audacity stretch no further!

But perhaps another will be found who will dare to say:

“When the ignorant and the foolish, who sin unknowingly,
Must undergo punishment as ones guilty,
The Good places them at the foot of Paradise,
Where they graze in those blest grasses to find some small
morsel.”

Praise be to Thy justice which exalts the victorious!

(*Hymn One*, stanza 16)

When He fashioned Paradise, He made there a diversity of
beauty,

For the splendor of one degree is greatly surpassed by the
next;

And further, as one degree is higher than another.

Thus He allocated the nether region to those below,

The middle region to those of the middle degree, and the
summit to the most exalted.

Blest is He, Who being pierced in His side, removed the
sword from Paradise!

When the righteous ascend the degrees of Paradise to receive
their inheritance,

Then each according to his toil shall be justly raised up,

Being held to that degree of which he was deemed worthy.

Her degrees offer room for all:

Her floor for the repentant, her middle region for the right-
eous,

Her heights for the victorious, and her summit for the
Divine Majesty.
Blest is He, Who being pierced in His side, removed the
sword from Paradise!

(*Hymn Two*, stanzas 10 and 11*)

So, from the Scriptures and the Saints, we learn that, both in salvation and in condemnation, our reward, as it were, will be “customized.” Everyone will get what fits — or, to paraphrase the Dismissal Hymn of the Feast of the Holy Transfiguration, what “each one can endure.” But again, according to the Scriptures and to the Saints, everyone will be given an opportunity, at some point, to hear the *true* message of the Gospel and to either accept or reject it. It will be a fair trial.

So, because we have a God Who loves us, we are hopeful. For example, in the Praises for Sunday Matins for Plagal of First Tone (Fifth Tone, in the Slavonic usage), we find these words:

O Lord, King of the ages and Creator of all, Thou didst accept crucifixion and burial in the flesh for us, *that Thou mightest free us all from Hades*. Thou art our God; beside Thee we know none other.

And also:

.....And crying out to the stout-hearted myrrh-bearing women, [the angel] said: Do ye not see the lifelessness of the guards, the loosening of the seals, *and the emptying of Hades*.^{**}

But still, I would *not* want to be in the shoes of those who knowingly pervert the teachings of Christ and His Church, or who, to the end of their days, persecute and slay His servants.

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I remember once hearing the following story. A slave ship cast anchor in a certain town where a saintly virgin lived, earnestly struggling in the ascetical life. Learning that the boat had arrived she was glad, because she had wanted to buy a little girl for herself. She thought to herself, “I’ll get a little girl and raise her myself, so that she’ll never know the evil of this world.” Thus, she sent for the boatswain, and found that he had two little girls exactly like she wanted. She happily paid the price at once, purchasing one of the two little girls for herself. The boatswain departed, but he had not gone far when he met a wretched chorus girl. The chorus girl saw the other little girl with him and decided she wanted to have her. So she agreed on a price, and the chorus girl left with the other little girl.

Can you see the mystery of God? His judgement? Who is able to interpret it? The saintly virgin took one girl and raised her with the fear of God, imbuing her with every virtue, teaching her every detail of the monastic life, and making her able to sense the holy commandments of God. The other unfortunate girl was taken by the wretched chorus girl and made into an instrument of the devil. What could riotous living teach her, other than the destruction of her soul? What can we say about this terrible judgement? Both the two girls were small, both sold without knowing where they were going, and one was put into the hands of God, whilst the other was given to the devil. *Is it possible that what God asks from the one, He also asks from the other? By no means! One had learned about the judgement and Kingdom of God and she lived with the words of God night and day. The other pitiable child never knew or heard anything good; on the contrary, she learned everything shameful and demonic. How then could one demand the same standard for both?*

Wherefore, man can know nothing about the judgment of

ing about people who have *never* been given an opportunity to hear the *true* (i.e., not false) Orthodox Christian message — what “second” opportunity is our correspondent talking about?

What About Hawaii?

What about the millions of people, for example, who were living on the Hawaiian Islands for centuries before the European missionaries appeared on their shores for the first time in the nineteenth century? What “opportunity” were *they* given to hear the Christian message before this?

And what a “Christian” message our Protestant friends brought!

Anselm’s “Satisfaction Theory,” Augustine’s teaching of predestination and inherited guilt, the private interpretation of the Scriptures, etc., etc., etc.

That is to say, it was a *distorted* Christian message that our Hawaiians heard!

If our writer considers *that* an “opportunity” to accept or reject the Christian message in this life, then why are we making all this fuss and bother in support of *true* Christianity — true *Orthodox* Christianity?

As a matter of fact, the Hawaiian people were offered an erroneous version of Christianity, so how can they be held to the same standard as those who were and are exposed to true Orthodox Christianity? Likewise, when Methodists or Lutherans, for example, are presented *only* with an *ecumenistic* version of Orthodox Christianity, have they heard the *real* thing? So, how can they be held as equally accountable as those who have known and cleaved to *true* Orthodoxy?

Indeed, Saint Dorotheus of Gaza makes exactly this point in his work, *That We Should Not Judge Our Neighbor*.

The Saint writes:

In his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul tells the Christians there that they should live a life of virtue, and not the dissolute life of the pagans around them. Then he inserts a quotation into his text in order to make his point. He writes:

*Thus it says: “Awake, sleeper, and arise from among the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee.”**

(Eph. 5:14)

Saint Paul does not tell us where this quotation comes from. One thing is certain: it is found nowhere in the canonical Holy Scriptures. This has led some to believe that Saint Paul is here quoting the title, or perhaps a verse, from an early Christian hymn about our Saviour’s descent into Hades.**

If that is so, then the words of that text are most reassuring.

What men must do, then, is live in a way that will make them receptive to Christ’s teaching.

This is why the Saints teach us: “Judge no man before the time.” “The time?” When is “the time”? The Final Judgement.

An Additional Thought About This Subject

This is not encouragement *not* to embrace the Orthodox Faith. The holy Apostle Peter says the righteous will scarcely be saved: I Peter 4:18. We still need to work out our salvation in fear and trembling, and those who *plan* to plead ignorance will hear, “God is not mocked,” and that those who knew their Lord’s will and did it not will be beaten with many stripes.

“At His commandment is done whatsoever pleaseth Him; and none can hinder, when He will save.”

Wisdom of Sirach, 39:18



* Some translations have “Christ will shine on thee.”

** Theodoret, *Commentarius in omnes B. Pauli Epistolas*.

MORE HEAT THAN LIGHT

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

I am genuinely sorry that my article “Awake, Sleeper!” seems to have generated more heat than light on the internet.

This is what I wrote to one person:

Universalism is the teaching that says that *people will be saved no matter what they believe*.

Orthodox Christianity, in contrast, teaches that *only* those who believe the truth of Christ’s teachings will be saved.

Do we believe in our Saviour’s descent into Hades or not?

Do we believe that He preached to the souls that were imprisoned there or not? What was the purpose of His preaching in Hades?

What do the Saints have to say about this?

The article “Awake, Sleeper” only repeats what the Saints say. See also the article, “Sheol Delenda Est!”

When I wrote the article “Awake, Sleeper!”, I wrote what I and others had found in the Church Fathers and the writings of the Saints. If someone else has found *other* viewpoints in the patristic writings, I am certain everybody would like to see them and share them, so that we may find what the consensus is in these writings.

The one thing we *don’t* need is people’s personal opinions about this matter.

We have found more material about this important issue, and it is being translated into English right now. So, stay tuned.



To the above, our critic voices his objection:

“There is nothing [*sic*] written by the Holy Fathers that supports this notion. I used the word ‘second’ because this so-called chance in the next life that ‘everyone’ will have makes the opportunities given to us in this life much less urgent.”

How easy it is to put words into people’s mouths!

“Awake, Sleeper” tells us that everyone will be given an opportunity either in this life, *or* in the next (it did *not* say, “both in this life *and* in the next”).

Also, when people say things like, “There is nothing written by the Holy Fathers that supports this notion,” — are we to assume that these people have read *all* the writings of the Holy Fathers and are in a position to say this??

Well, as a matter of fact, the patristic texts that we have read have a *great* deal to say about this matter.

Others, long before our time, have asked about these very issues: Who benefited from our Saviour’s descent into Hades? To whom did He proclaim His Gospel in Hades? Whom did He rescue out of Hades, and who entered Paradise?

To these questions, the Holy Fathers answered in different ways, and the same Father sometimes gave a different answer, depending, perhaps, on the people he was addressing.

In general terms, it may be said that the Eastern Fathers tended to be more optimistic about who accepted our Saviour’s preaching in Hades, while the Western writers were more pessimistic. More on this later.

Our critic, as we saw above, wrote: “I used the word ‘second’ because this so-called chance in the next life that ‘everyone’ will have makes the opportunities given to us in this life much less urgent.”

What “opportunities”? Since “Awake, Sleeper” was clearly speak-

demn anyone to perdition. They did not concern themselves with the doings of others, but took care only for themselves, lest they should fall away from true piety. In precisely the same way, when Daniel was cast into the lion's den, he did not condemn any of those who, fulfilling the law of Darius, did not wish to pray to God, but he kept in mind his own duty, and desired rather to die than to sin against his conscience by transgressing the Law of God. God forbid that I should condemn anyone or say that I alone am being saved! However, I shall sooner die than to apostatize in any way from the true Faith, and thereby suffer torments of conscience.”¹²



NOT A SECOND OPPORTUNITY

or

Aloha, Christ God!

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

Recently, someone wrote that the Metropolitan of Boston (i.e., yours truly) teaches the error that everybody will be given a “second” opportunity in Hades either to reject or accept the teachings of Christ.

When asked where he found this teaching in Metropolitan Ephraim's writings, he quoted the following text from the article “Awake, Sleeper”:

“Essentially, what Saint Philaret (and the Church Fathers) say is that, in order to judge mankind fairly, our Saviour will give every person who ever lived on earth the opportunity to espouse or reject His teaching. Whether this happens while the person is still living or in Hades—whenever it happens—he or she will have the opportunity to make that choice.”

¹² Birchall, C., *The Life of Our Holy Father St. Maximus the Confessor*, p. 38.

DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER!

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

Everyone who will be in Paradise will be a believing Orthodox Christian.

It is with this understanding that the article “Awake, Sleeper” quotes the *Hymns of Paradise* by Saint Ephraim the Syrian and his teaching on the degrees of perfection.

The question is: when and how did they become believing Orthodox Christians?

What does our sacred literature say about this?

Before touching on this, it might be of interest to us to know that recently, the Lutheran newspaper, *Christian News* (Dec. 14, 2009), had an article about “universalism”. The article used the term in the exact same sense that I use it: the false teaching that all men will be saved, *no matter what they believe*.

This is not an Orthodox Christian teaching, and none of our Church Fathers espoused this doctrine.

One way to argue a point is to put words into your opponent's mouth. For example, some have tried to imply that my article, “Awake, Sleeper!” teaches that all men will be saved, or that there is salvation outside of the Church. But neither I, nor any of the Saints that I quoted, teach any such thing anywhere. Instead, what I found was that the Holy Scriptures and our Saints teach that all men will be given *an opportunity* to accept or reject the Gospel of Christ. This is very different.

Perhaps it would be useful here to repeat some of what I found in our sacred writings, just to refresh our memory.

The Holy Scriptures teach us that, after His Passion, our Saviour descended into Hades to preach to the souls held in bondage there.

What does the Dismissal Hymn of Saint John the Forerunner say about this? Here is the text:

The memory of the just is celebrated with hymns of praise, but the Lord's testimony is sufficient for thee, O Forerunner; for thou hast proved to be truly even more venerable than the Prophets, since thou wast granted to baptize in the running waters Him Whom they proclaimed. Wherefore having contested for the truth, *thou didst rejoice to announce the good tidings even to those in Hades: that God hath appeared in the flesh, taking away the sin of the world and granting us great mercy.*

Every Orthodox Christian already knows that "God hath appeared in the flesh and taken away the sin of the world," so what's the point of preaching this to those who already know?

In the *Octoëchos* we read the following:

O Lord, King of the ages and Creator of all, Thou didst accept crucifixion and burial in the flesh for us, *that Thou mightiest free us all from Hades.* Thou art our God; beside Thee we know none other.

And also:

...And crying out to the stout-hearted myrrh-bearing women, [the angel] said: Do ye not see the lifelessness of the guards, the loosing of the seals, *and the emptying of Hades.*

(Sunday Matins Praises, Plagal of First Tone)

When we read and chant these words in Church, we should have certain things in mind:

1. Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston did not compose these hymns.

2. These hymns have been in the Orthodox Church's *Octoëchos* for centuries — *many, many* centuries.

actions put one outside those limits. The Ecumenical Councils and the canons of the Church set the boundaries of the Church. Anyone who rejects the doctrines and canons they define is outside the Church on earth, no matter what title he may hold or how many ancient church buildings he may occupy. If you give up your citizenship in your native country, you are no longer a citizen of it; the same thing is true if you give up your citizenship in the Lord's Orthodox Church you are not an Orthodox Christian any longer. The HOCNA looks at other bodies which claim to be Orthodox Christian Churches and sees that they have denied the fundamental doctrines and canons of the Ecumenical Councils and the Orthodox Church throughout history. In response, it says that in its judgment such bodies are no longer part of the Orthodox Church, even though they came from it originally, since they no longer bear the marks of membership in the Orthodox Church. And it is likely that many of these bodies would in fact agree with us that they are no longer part of that tradition of Orthodoxy which they consider outmoded and "unsuited to the demands of modern life."

As far as we are able, we try to keep the doctrines and practices (canons) of the Orthodox Church unchanged, believing that thereby we maintain our unity with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are fearful for those who do not maintain this unity, but we do not judge their salvation. We do say that, in our judgment, they are no longer members of the Orthodox Church, and therefore we cannot share with them in prayer and the Holy Mysteries; but as to their ultimate fate God alone is their judge and we commend them to His mercy. To sum up our view on those who depart from Orthodoxy, we can do no better than to quote the words of St. Maximus the Confessor (+ 662) when he was undergoing persecution for refusing to follow the apostate Patriarchs of the East in his day. His persecutors inquired of him, "Then you alone will be saved, and all others will perish?" And he replied, "When all the people in Babylon were worshiping the golden idol, the Three Holy Children did not con-

Furthermore, let us not forget that when standing before the face of God, one who is merely convinced of the truth of the Church will not become united to Her (how could he not be convinced of it, seeing Her glory face to face?), but only one who is worthy of it, that is, whose mental disposition is sufficiently pure. Only one who, in spite of his alienation from the Church, has developed in himself the virtues of love and humility, can with God's help pass through this ordeal.

But this is merely a speculation of ours, which, as far as heretics and schismatics are concerned, does not have firm grounds in the writings of the Church; for the Church points out the unique and therefore the absolutely true way to salvation. She calls Her sons to full perfection, and gives no reassurance to those who hope to attain blessedness without Her and Her saving gifts of grace. For, if salvation is difficult for each one of us, for those who have been reborn in Holy Baptism, who have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Chrismation, who have been freed of our sins in the mystery of Repentance, who partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord, in a word, who make use of all the universal wealth of the Church of Christ, then how can one who does not have all this be saved?¹¹

The HOCNA and its mother True Orthodox Church in Greece have never differed from the rest of Orthodoxy on the salvation or damnation of those outside the Orthodox Church on earth, and one of the HOCNA's most prominent parishes actually published Bishop Gregory's reflections, cited above, in an English translation so that they would be known by Orthodox Christians in America.

But what, then, does the HOCNA say about modernist "Orthodox" Churches and their members? Doesn't it teach that they, at least, are damned? The Orthodox Church teaches that there are limits to the visible Church on earth, and that certain teachings and

3. Millions and millions of pious Orthodox Christian monastics and laypeople have chanted these hymns over and over again, and not one of them, to my knowledge, was ever accused of being a "universalist," or of teaching that there is salvation outside of the Church.

4. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* — "The law of prayer is the law of belief."

5. These hymns were composed by Saint John of Damascus, who also wrote the following:

Some say that [Christ delivered from Hades] only those who believed,
Such as fathers and prophets,
Judges and, with them, kings and rulers,
and others of the Hebrew people,
not numerous or known to many.

But we shall reply to those who think this
that there is nothing marvelous or strange
in Christ saving those who had believed;
for He alone is the just Judge,
and everyone who believes in Him shall not perish.

Wherefore, they all ought to have been saved
and delivered from the bonds of Hades
by the descent of our God and Master;
for this very thing came to pass by His foresight.

Whereas those who were saved only by His *philanthropia*
[love for mankind]
were, I think, all those
who had the purest life,
and performed all manner of good works
living in modesty, temperance
yet, they had not grasped [or, apprehended — Gr. *katélavon*]
the pure and divine Faith,

¹¹ Bishop Gregory, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

because they had not been instructed in it,
and remained altogether untutored.

They were those whom the Steward and Master of all
drew and captured in His divine nets,
and persuaded to believe in Him,
illuminating them with His divine rays
and showing them the True Light.

*(Concerning Those Who Died in Faith,
St. John of Damascus, PG. 95, 257 AC)*

In Saint John of Damascus' Dismissal Hymn, we chant:

Guide of Orthodoxy, teacher of piety and holiness, luminary
of the world, God-inspired adornment of monastics, O wise
John, by thy teaching thou hast enlightened all, O harp of
the Spirit. Intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved.

So please don't shoot the messenger! I'm only the messenger boy,
and I'm in good company.

When I find more in our sacred texts about this subject, you'll
hear about it.



HARROWING HADES IN HOMILIES

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

One of the most moving sermons on our Saviour's Descent into Hades was delivered by Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus (+403). Some thirty years ago, Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline, Mass., published the entire sermon in the book, *The Lamentations of Matins of Holy and Great Saturday*. Because of its length, we cannot

in mind the Saviour's words: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii, 22-28). Doubtless these words refer to heretics who are so unrepentant that even at the Last Judgment they squabble with God and in their deception hurl accusations at Him. If one can conceive of the posthumous psychology of such a man who has spent his whole life in a community separated from the Church, one will understand how hard it would be for him to repent and become united with the Church. Without dwelling too long on this point, let us indicate a few obstacles. They will see that sins which they have already considered forgiven still weigh upon them with their full burden, and that those men whom they have been accustomed to regard as saints will be handed over to severe torments on hearing the words of the Saviour quoted above. Under such conditions, is it not easier to accept Christ if one has never known anything about Him previously, rather than if one has a distorted conception of Him which has already taken root in one? Did not St. John Chrysostom mean this when he said that "With incorrect dogmas there is no profit even from a good life, just as the reverse is also true: sound dogmas are of no profit with a depraved life" (*Homily on the Gospel of John the Theologian*, VIII, Book 2, p. 447)? How easy it is for one living outside the Church to give in to grumbling against God, Who has not made him worthy to be born within the bosom of the Church! How easy, instead of humble prayer for his acceptance even at the "twelfth hour" into the communion of the Church, for him to flare up with hate for those to blame for the error! And any sort of hatred, any sort of anger, separates from God.

tion. But while this may be possible in God's mercy, it is also very hard and uncertain. Consider what Bishop Gregory Grabbe writes about such people:

But how terrible the testimonies of the Holy Fathers are, concerning the fate of heretics and schismatics! These testimonies, of course, primarily refer to those who on earth were at war with the Church, that is, who struggled against Christ, rending His seamless garment. But neither is it easy for the lukewarm heretic to be united with the Church. The fact is, that if self-perfecting is possible to some degree after death (only until the Last Judgment, of course), nevertheless a man's moral condition after death is only a continuation of the state in which death found him, just as in maturity those principles adopted by a man in childhood and youth receive their application and development. Consequently, the errors even of those who have not consciously been at direct war with the Church of Christ will interfere with their being united to the Church. Of course, for them as for pagans, good works, mercy, love for one's neighbor, do not remain without benefit. They prepare them too for being united with the Church after death. But any moral teaching which has been distorted by the heretics will stand in the way of repentance, which is indispensable for being united to the Church; and the best of works may turn out to be so only superficially, in actual fact bringing the soul no profit.¹⁰ That juridical system of moral teaching which is held by the Western heretics, for example, cannot be ignored in this context. The view of good works as a man's merit can become an obstacle to humble repentance, and the conviction that one is right can lead to the questioning of Divine justice. I have

¹⁰ Such, for example, are works of mercy without real love for the suffering, which are done for the sake of "merit" before God, or still worse, from vainglory. The distortion of dogmas tells upon moral principles also, and consequently can make works of charity not cleanse the soul, but darken it. [Note in original.]

reproduce the whole sermon here, but we would like to present just two small portions here for the edification of our readers. However, none of you are absolved of the obligation of reading this wonderful homily in its entirety. If you fail to do so, you are only cheating yourselves.

Here, therefore, are the two portions, which we are dangling before your eyes as "teasers", just to lure you into reading the whole thing:

Ye that from ages past have fallen asleep, rejoice! Ye that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, receive the great Light! With the servants is the Master; with the dead is God; with the mortal is Life; with the guilty is the Guiltless; with those in darkness is the unwaning Light; with the captives is the Liberator; and with those in the nethermost is He that is above the very heavens. Christ [came] upon earth, and we have believed; Christ is among the dead, let us descend with Him and behold those mysteries yonder! Let us come to know the wonders of the Hidden One hidden under the earth! Let us learn how and to whom the *kerygma* was manifested in Hades!

What then? Did God save absolutely all when He appeared in Hades? In no wise. But there also He saved them that believed. Yesterday economy, today authority; yesterday the tokens of infirmity, today those of majesty; yesterday the tokens of humanity, today those of Divinity. Yesterday, He was slapped; today He smites the tenement of Hades with the lightning of His Divinity. Yesterday He was bound; today He binds the tyrant with infrangible bonds. Yesterday He was condemned; today He bestows liberty on the condemned. Yesterday Pilate's ministers mocked Him; today Hades' gatekeepers saw Him and trembled.

Towards the end of Saint Epiphanius' Homily, we learn the following:

Adam turned towards all his fellow captives from ages past and said, "I hear the sound of Someone's feet advancing towards us, and if He deigns to come even to this place, we shall be freed of our bonds, nay, if we should but see Him in our midst, we shall be delivered from Hades!" And as Adam said these things and their like to all his fellow prisoners, the Master entered within, holding the Cross as a weapon of victory. Then Adam the first-fashioned beholding Him, beat his breast in exuberance and cried to all, "My Lord be with you all!" And Christ replied and said to Adam, "And with thy spirit," and grasping his hand, He said, "Stand up, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine on thee'. (Eph. 5:14) I am thy God, Who for thy sake became thy Son, for thy sake and for thy descendants' sake, and now I say and, with authority, command the shackled, Come forth! and those in darkness, Be enlightened! and those asleep, Arise! I enjoin thee, Awake, O sleeper! for I did not fashion thee to be held in Hades as a captive. Arise from the dead, for I am the Life of the dead! Arise, My creation, arise, Mine image, who wast also made in My likeness! 'Arise, let us go hence!' for thou art in Me and I in thee; we are one indivisible person. For thy sake thy God became thy Son; for thy sake the Master took the image of a slave; for thy sake I Who am above the heavens came down upon earth and even beneath the earth; for thee, who art a man, I became as a man without help, free among the dead'" (Ps. 87:4).

A QUESTION

If our Saviour's Descent into Hades was an event that rescued only the souls that were imprisoned there *only* up until that time, as some say, then why do the Lives of the Saints record accounts about

stand, "For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? . . . But those who are outside God judges" (II Corinthians 5:12-13). This means that we have no right to predetermine their fate. God "has mercy on whom He wills" (Romans 9:18). There is only one thing which we must note: "to lead a completely righteous life," as the questioner expressed it, means to live according to the commandments of blessedness. But this is beyond the strength of an "outside" person, one who is outside the grace-giving help which is hidden in Christ's Orthodox Church.⁸

Precisely the same understanding—that we do not know what the state of such people will be, so we leave them to God, refusing to set limits to His mercy and trusting that He is capable of uniting them to His Church even after death—is also taught by representative Greek Orthodox theologians.⁹

Perhaps at this point the reader will grant that the Orthodox Church does not teach that pagans and the like are necessarily damned, but what about heretics and schismatics? The Holy Fathers do teach that such men are subject to God's condemnation, but they also leave them to Him to judge, since we cannot know their true motives or culpability.

One may be tempted to ask what reason there is for anyone to be Orthodox, since it would seem that the Orthodox Church teaches that salvation can be found even by those who did not join it during their earthly lives. In fact, it might seem that we are even holding out the possibility that heretics and schismatics may attain salva-

⁸ Taushev, Archbishop Averky, *Voprosy i Otvety [Questions and Answers]*, p. 28. It is worth noting that Bishop Gregory is a representative of the more patristic school of Russian theology, revitalized by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), while Archbishop Averky speaks for the scholastic school of Russian theology, but they both agree on the question of salvation for those outside the Orthodox Church.

⁹ For example: Androustos, K., *Dogmatikê tês Orthodoxou Anatolikês Ekklesiâs*, pp. 266-267.

In the second place, the attainment of blessedness outside the Church is precluded by the ideas expressed above, for the indispensable condition for it is union with the Church, **even though after death.** [Emphasis supplied]⁷

Archbishop Averky (Taushev) of Syracuse-Holy Trinity, also of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, answered a question about the salvation of those outside the Church as follows:

“Mercy does not depend on him who wills, nor on him who labors, but on God who shows mercy,” says the Apostle (Romans 9:16). In the Church we are shown the way to salvation and are given the means, with the assistance of which a person is cleansed morally and has the direct promise of salvation. In this sense St. Cyprian of Carthage says that outside the Church “there is no salvation.” In the Church there is given to Christians—only to Christians—that of which the Apostle Peter writes: “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Peter 1:3-8). What can we say about those on the outside, those who do not belong to the Church? Another apostle gives us to under-

⁷ Grabbe, Bishop Gregory, “The Unity and Uniqueness of the Church,” *Sz. Nectarios Educational Series*, No. 29, p. 11. Anyone who wishes fully to enter into the Orthodox Church’s teaching on this subject should read this whole article.

souls that were rescued from Hades *centuries later*?

Certainly, I hope you *are* reading the Lives of the Saints.



INSCRUTABLE MERCY

or

Saint Thecla to the Rescue!

Part One

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

We are led to believe that God, in His inscrutable mercy, and by the prayers of the Saints, will, at some point, grant mankind the opportunity to follow or to reject His teaching. We are led to this conclusion by the teachings that we find in the Lives of the Saints and in the writings of the Church Fathers.

With the help of God, we hope to provide these texts to you in installments, as we prepare them.

Below, as a first taste of these sacred texts, we provide some portions from the Life of Saint Thecla, the first woman martyr, and also some commentary on her life by that great Saint and Father of the Church, John Damascene.

From the Life of Saint Thecla

The holy Thecla, receiving the same sentence as those committing sacrilege, was to be cast to the beasts; since she dared to tear the raiment of the governor. The holy maiden, desiring a favor from the proconsul, asked that she might be kept in the custody of some honorable woman. Thecla desired to safeguard herself from defilement until the third day, when she would contend with the wild beasts. He hearkened to her request and remanded her to a noble and wealthy widow, named Tryphaena, who recently had lost her daughter,

Falconilla.

Tryphaena then took Thecla home. During those three days, Tryphaena came to love Thecla greatly. When Tryphaena beheld Thecla's angelic face and heard her mellifluous words, it pained her soul to be separated from her. Tryphaena wept when Thecla was led to the place of condemnation. Putting aside her high rank, Tryphaena went with other women to the amphitheater to witness the spectacle. All the young women, sympathetic toward Thecla, wept and denounced this unjust sentence.

The servants of the court bound the martyr and cast her into the arena with the wild beasts. One of the beasts was a fierce lioness which, as she approached the holy Thecla, abandoned her innate ferocity and became tame, licking the maiden's feet. A placard was written above, denoting Thecla's crime: "Sacrilegious: Death Penalty." Viewing this harsh sentence, the crowd was taken aback, and said, "Unjustly is the innocent one condemned!" Tryphaena, endued with divine grace, went into the arena with the beasts. She took hold of the martyr and went to her house rejoicing.

That night, by God's economy, Tryphaena beheld in a vision her daughter Falconilla,* who said, "My mother, love the stranger, Thecla. Take her as thy daughter in my place; for she is the handmaid of God. She can entreat the Lord to place me with the righteous." Tryphaena then awakened, and related the matter to Thecla, saying, "O Thecla, my second child, I beseech thee to do me this one benefaction: Pray to Thy Christ to grant rest and eternal life unto my daughter; for this is what she requested in a vision." Straightway, the holy maiden raised her hands and voice in prayer to the Heavens, and uttered, "My Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the

sentence, knowing the command of her Saviour and Head, "not to judge another man's servant" (Rom. 14.4).⁶

Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia considers this whole issue at length:

We have already explained the meaning of redemption for Christians. As for the rest of mankind, it consists in the fact that the wall of hell [=Sheol, Hades] has been broken down. The descent of Christ into hell and His preaching there has made it possible to pass from it to heaven, that is, from a condition of torment to one of blessedness. How? By adopting the preaching of Christ, even though after death. The pagans who did not know about Christ on earth are in the same position as the mass of Old Testament humanity. Virtues prompted by the conscience are accessible to them, but Christian self-perfecting is inaccessible to them. With respect to life beyond the grave, they are similar to most of the people of the Old Testament. These people knew Christ only after death and received the possibility of leaving hell with Him. The pagans, too, who know Christ only after death, either accept His preaching and are united to the Church, or else become embittered and surrender themselves to torments.

How can we reconcile the thoughts here expressed with the doctrine of the Holy Fathers that salvation is impossible outside the Church? Very simply.

In the first place, salvation itself must be understood in a more comprehensive manner than as simply receiving a reward for a virtuous life. Salvation in Christian terms means self-perfecting, with the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. There is none of this outside the Church.

* Falconilla was a young, pagan woman who died unbaptized.

⁶ Khomyakov, A. S., *The Church is One*, section 2; p. 18.

13). From these passages, the Fathers and theologians of the Church have drawn a consistent conclusion about the state of those who have never been members of the visible Church on earth. Various teachers have expressed the same general view, so we will give only a few representative examples of it here.

Thus, for example, a well-known Russian theologian of this century teaches:

But the limits of the Church beyond death and the possibilities for salvation for those who have not known the light in this life, remain a mystery of the divine mercy for us, on which we dare not count, but to which we cannot place any human bonds.⁴

And the famous Russian theologian of the last century, A. S. Khomyakov, expressed the same ideas:

Inasmuch as the earthly and visible Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord has appointed to appear at the final judgement of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits; and (according to the words of Paul the Apostle, to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 5:12)⁵ does not judge the rest of mankind, and only looks upon those as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of mankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgement of the great day. The Church on earth judges for herself only, according to the grace of the Spirit, and the freedom granted her through Christ, inviting also the rest of mankind to the unity and adoption of God in Christ; but upon those who do not hear her appeal she pronounces no

⁴ Lossky, V., *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 235.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:12: For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

true and living God, hearken unto thy handmaid and grant rest to the soul of Falconilla in life eternal, according to Thy holy will.”

When Tryphaena heard this entreaty, she rejoiced. Soon afterward, however, she felt sorrow and wept for Thecla. She remembered that Alexander was coming again to arrest Thecla, so they might put her to death.*

From the Writings of Saint John of Damascus

Did not the first female martyr [Thecla] save Falconilla after death? But you will say that she was worthy to do so, since she was the first female martyr, and it was fitting that her prayer be heard. But I say to you, yes she was the first female martyr, but look at the sort of person for whom she made the request: a pagan idol worshipper, an altogether unholy servant of another lord!

(St. John of Damascus,
Concerning Those Who have Died in the Faith
PG 95. 261-64)

St. Thecla reposed A. D. 90. This is some six decades “after” Christ’s Resurrection and Descent into Hades. And, as we shall see, there are more such cases, as the Church Fathers testify.

Centuries later, *The Paradise of the Fathers* by Palladius tells us much the same thing:

A certain man made himself remote from the world, and he had a wife and also a daughter, and the latter died before she had been baptized by the disciples; and her father distributed among the poor the portion which came to her, and also that of his wife; but he never ceased to make entreaty to God on behalf of his daughter who had departed from the world without being baptized. And a voice was heard by him as he was praying, which said, “I have baptized thy daughter, have

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no sorrow”; but he did not believe. And that voice, which was hidden, spake again unto him, saying, “Uncover her grave, and look [in], and thou wilt not find her”; then he went to her grave, and dug it up, and he found her not, for she had departed, and had been laid to rest with the believers.*



INSCRUTABLE MERCY

or

More Saints to the Rescue!

Part Two

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

In the previous article, we read the account about Falconilla in the Life of Saint Thecla, and also Saint John Damascene’s observations about Falconilla.

It is evident that Falconilla, by the prayers of Saint Thecla, somehow had the capacity to repent of her former idolatry and to espouse the truth of the Christian faith, to which she had *never* had the opportunity to be exposed in her lifetime.

How else could she have been counted worthy of “rest and eternal life” in the Kingdom of God?

Below, we present more examples of God’s inscrutable mercy towards mankind. The first example is from the Life of Saint Perpetua of Carthage, who was martyred A. D. 203. This account is written by Saint Perpetua herself while she was in prison, shortly before her execution. At one point, this is what she writes:

Some days later when we were all at prayer, suddenly while praying I spoke out and uttered the name Dinocrates. I was

* *The Paradise of the Fathers*; edited by W. Budge, published by St. Nectarios Press, Seattle, Washington, vol. 2, pp. 191-2, 1978.

know the Master’s will and do things worthy of punishment will receive a much lighter punishment than those who do know it and fail to obey it (Luke 12:47-48).³ And St. Paul teaches that men will be judged by how well they obey the Law which is written in their hearts, even if they are outside the Covenant in this life: “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law unto themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Romans 2:12-16). The Apostle also refused to judge those outside the Church, saying “For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? . . . But those who are outside God judges” (I Cor. 5:12-

or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38. When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39. Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40. And the King shall answer and say unto them, Amen, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. 42. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink. 43. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45. Then shall he answer them, saying, 'I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

³ Luke 12:47-48: 47. And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. 48. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

past. This is one area which many of them may have failed to examine, so it is quite possible that they are interpreting the HOCNA's stand from the viewpoint of their previous denominations, rather than in an Orthodox manner. And it is not uncommon to find that even those who have been raised in Orthodoxy in this country have been influenced by the dominant Protestant and Roman Catholic views surrounding them. For this reason, it is important to start by looking carefully at the teaching of the Orthodox Church on salvation for those who are not members of the Church.

It is true that St. Cyprian of Carthage and other Fathers stated that "outside the Church there is no salvation." However, if one looks at their actual statements, one quickly sees that they are discussing certain specific situations: either the case of those who have been members of the Church and then have consciously and willfully abandoned the Church or the case of those pagans who have heard the Gospel and have rejected it. They do not usually address the case of those who have never even heard of Christ (pagans, etc.), and they do not really consider the case of those who have fallen away from the Church "by accident," i.e. by following hierarchs they trusted to be Orthodox, but who in fact have led them into error without their being aware of it. In these instances, we must fall back on several passages in the Scriptures which teach us that God will judge all nations primarily on the basis of how well they have served Christ, even if they did not know Him (Matt. 25:32-46, especially v. 44).² In St. Luke's Gospel, the Lord tells us that those who do not

² Matthew 25:32-46: 32. And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. 33. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in. 36. Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?

surprised; for the name had never entered my mind until that moment. And I was pained when I recalled what had happened to him. At once I realized that I was privileged to pray for him. I began to pray for him and to sigh deeply for him before the Lord. That very night I had the following vision. I saw Dinocrates coming out of a dark hole, where there were many others with him, very hot and thirsty, pale and dirty. On his face was the wound he had when he had died.

Now Dinocrates had been my brother according to the flesh; but he had died horribly of cancer of the face when he was seven years old, and his death was a source of loathing to everyone. Thus it was for him that I made my prayer. There was a great abyss between us: neither could approach the other. Where Dinocrates stood there was a pool full of water; and its rim was higher than the child's height, so Dinocrates had to stretch himself up to drink. I was sorry that, though the pool had water in it, Dinocrates could not drink because of the height of the rim. Then I woke up, realizing that my brother was suffering.* But I was confident that I could help him in his trouble; and I prayed for him every day until we were transferred to the military prison. For we were supposed to fight with the beasts at the military games to be held on the occasion of the emperor Geta's birthday. And I prayed for my brother day and night with tears and sighs that this favour might be granted me.

On the day we were kept in chains, I had this vision shown to me. I saw the same spot that I had seen before, but there was Dinocrates all clean, well dressed, and refreshed. I saw a scar where the wound had been; and the pool that I had seen before, now had its rim lowered to the level of the child's

* Apparently, Dinocrates was unbaptized when he died. St. Perpetua herself was a convert to Christianity, being the daughter of pagan parents.

waist. And Dinocrates kept drinking water from it, and there above the rim was a golden bowl full of water. And Dinocrates drew close and began to drink from it, and yet the bowl remained full. And when he had drunk enough of the water, he began to play as children do. Then I awoke, and I realized that he had been delivered from his suffering.

Note that the account does not say that Dinocrates was in the glory and splendor of the Saints, but only that he was no longer suffering and was “playing like a child.” Perhaps, as Saint Ephraim the Syrian might have said in his *Hymns on Paradise*, the account is trying to tell us that Dinocrates was counted worthy of some measure of Paradise, according to his capacity.

Nevertheless, this is yet another instance of a soul rescued from the suffering in Hades, and this is now the third century “after” our Saviour’s Descent into Hades.

If these accounts are misleading or heretical, then one must ask: why have they been cherished and treasured in the Church’s memory for all these centuries? If they were misleading, then they should have been condemned, to prevent people from being led astray by their wrong message. Yet, they appear time and again, and are repeated and endorsed by eminent Saints and Fathers of the Church, as we shall see.

We must remember that the Church has millions of Saints, all of whom were taught to pray for mankind’s salvation, and were instructed by our Saviour in the Gospel to:

Love your enemies . . . and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Most High; for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

(Luke 6:35-6)

It appears the Church felt that, by the prayers of the Saints, God, in His mercy, would extend an opportunity to people to

Our duty is to obey the rules, and *hope* (and pray — as we always do) for God’s mercy.



Metropolitan Ephraim's editorial note: The following excellent article was written by Protopresbyter Seraphim Johnson in 1992.

Is There Salvation Outside the Old-Calendar Orthodox Church?

It is a sad fact that many of those who disagree with the Holy Orthodox Church in North America’s (HOCNA) firm stand for the Orthodox Faith claim that this body teaches that anyone who is not a member of it is “damned to hell.” This is a very serious charge, which, if true, would argue that the HOCNA has itself abandoned the Christian faith. Many of those who make this claim have come to Orthodoxy from one of the Western churches, either Protestant or Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally taught that infants who die unbaptized can hope for nothing more than Limbo, a state superior to hell, but significantly below heaven, in which they will experience natural happiness, but not supernatural bliss.¹ The Protestant reformers (Luther, Calvin, etc.) go even further and teach that all who have not accepted Christ in this life will be condemned to hell. “Evangelical” Protestantism continues to teach this doctrine, but more liberal varieties of Protestantism have largely lost interest in the question of salvation. Unfortunately, when former Protestants and Roman Catholics are baptized into Orthodoxy, they often bring much baggage along with them from their

¹ Bullough, S., *Roman Catholicism*, pp. 83-84. Roman Catholicism teaches that adults may, however, attain salvation through the “Baptism of Desire,” even if they have not received physical Baptism. This teaching, although phrased differently, has similarities to that of Orthodoxy.

So, given the fact that He alone has this knowledge, and we do not, only He is in a position to judge each person fairly.

In the meantime, *we* need the rules. We *need* to observe the commandments, we *need* to obey His teachings, to keep the traditions we have received, whether by word or by writing, we *need* to keep the holy fasts and the holy canons and the laws of God, because if we fail to do so, we will bring harm upon ourselves. But God has no need of rules, or of Sabbaths, or of fasts, or canons, and the like. He is in charge. He *sets* the rules for us, because we are His rowdy children.

At this point in time, we can only *hope* that His love for us will prevail over His justice. That is why, in the Divine Liturgy, and in all our services, we repeat again and again:

“Lord, have mercy.”

For now, we must keep, and hold on to all the rules.

Some years ago, one of the monks from Holy Transfiguration Monastery was driving me to Saint Mark’s Cathedral in Roslindale, Massachusetts. It was a Sunday morning, so there were virtually no cars on the road. We came to a stop light at an intersection. I looked to the left. I looked to the right. No cars anywhere. I remembered George our bus driver and his “optional laws” back in Greece. So, paraphrasing the Gospel passage, I said to my driver:

“‘The law was made for man, not man for the law,’ Mark 2, verse 27. There are no cars, so you can go through the light.”

Pointing to the red light, my monk-driver responded:

“‘Be still, and know that I am God,’ Psalm 45, verse 10.”

So, the laws are for man.

Furthermore, it is God’s prerogative to be just, and it is also His prerogative to allow His divine justice to be overcome by His love for mankind and His “great mercy,” as our hymnology tells us time and again.

believe in Him even after their repose, and be spared from Hades. This was because the Church Fathers, it seems, believed that Christ’s Descent into Hades had the quality of timelessness to it, and His mercy would be extended to those who, in this life, had never had the opportunity to hear or “grasp” (as St. John Damascene would say) the true Christian teaching.

The account that is recorded below concerning Saint Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome (+604), first appears in the eighth century, that is, in the century after his repose. This is not unusual in the Lives of the Saints; for example, Cyril of Scythopolis, who recorded the Lives of many prominent Saints of the Judean desert, and whose accounts are regarded as trustworthy and impeccable, wrote the Life of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified some eighty years after the Saint’s repose.

Another element that is noteworthy is how widespread the convictions were among early Orthodox Christians that the prayers of the Saints could rescue even unbelievers from the tyranny and pangs of Hades — even centuries “after” the Descent of our Saviour into Hades.

According to one incident recorded in Saint Gregory the Great’s Life, the Saint was moved by the report that he had heard regarding the justice and humility the pagan emperor Trajan had shown towards a poor widow, whose son had been slain. Consequently, Saint Gregory prayed and received from God the assurance that the soul of the emperor had been delivered from Hades.

This is what that “guide of Orthodoxy, and teacher of piety and holiness,” Saint John Damascene, has to say about Saint Gregory the Great:

Gregory the Dialogist, the senior bishop of Rome, as everybody knows, was a man well known for his righteousness and knowledge. They even say that a divine angel assisted him when he was conducting the Liturgy. One day this

Gregory, while taking a walk on a stone pavement, stood carefully still and uttered a mighty prayer directed toward the soul-loving Lord for the forgiveness of the sins of Trajan the king. Immediately after saying these things, he heard a voice borne to him from God: “I have heard your prayer and I grant forgiveness to Trajan. But you should not again put forward prayers addressed to Me on behalf of pagans.”* And that this story is true and blameless, the whole of the East and West is witness. Look, this even surpasses what happened to Falconilla. For she was a party to no other evil (beyond idolatry), but Trajan brought about the deaths of many martyrs. Thou art marvelous, Lord, and marvelous are Thy works! We praise Thine incredible goodness, because Thou always dost incline toward the love of mankind!

(St. John Damascus,
Concerning Those Who have Died in the Faith
PG 95. 261-64)

I believe that we may be assured from this that, at least, Saint John of Damascus is praying for the salvation of mankind!

Another pillar of Orthodoxy has this to say:

“Certain people were heard not only when they prayed for the faithful, but also for the unfaithful. For example, the blessed Thecla, by means of her prayers, transferred Falconilla from the place of the unjust, and the great Gregory the Dialogist, as it is said, rescued the emperor Trajan.”

(St. Mark of Ephesus
[Ludovico Petit and Gregory Hoffmann,
De “Purgatorio,” p. 71.]

*Since Saint Gregory lived at a time before the popes of Rome became “infallible,” he may have made the mistake of including Trajan’s name among those who can be commemorated in the Offering, during the Liturgy of the Faithful, i.e. only people known to be Orthodox Christians.

because He gave some of us the power to bind and to loose does not mean that He relinquished that power. *He* is the Head of the Church, not we, nor the pope of Rome.

In connection with all this, Saint John of Damascus writes:

“We wish to demonstrate to you that the supremely good God is overcome by His love for mankind. For example, He says, ‘Nineveh shall be destroyed,’ yet it was not destroyed, because His goodness overcame His justice [Jonas 3:4]. Also, as regards Hezekias, He said, “Set your household in order, because you are going to die, and shall not live,” yet, he did not die [IV Kingdoms 20:1-6]. Also, to Ahab, He said, “I shall bring on evil”; yet, He did not do it, but said, “Do you see how Ahab was pierced with sorrow? Because of this, I will not bring on the evil in his days [III Kingdoms 20:25-27].” Once again, His goodness prevailed over His decision [to punish], as indeed happened in very many other instances, and His love for mankind will always prevail until the Last Judgment, at which time the end of this festival* will come, and there will no longer be an occasion for succour...”

(*Concerning Those That Have Reposed in Faith*, 14,
St. John of Damascus)

In similar fashion, one can only hope that the Scriptural admonitions concerning “the strait gate” (Luke 13:24), and “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14), and the like, will fall into the same category as God’s warnings which Saint John of Damascus mentions above. But all this, of course, depends solely on God’s mercy and our repentance.

So, according to what the wise Damascene tells us, God sets the rules, and He can also abrogate them, as He sees fit. God alone knows the heart of every human being that has ever lived on earth.

* “Festival.” St. John writes this, perhaps ironically, meaning the period of time before the Final and dread Judgment Day.

Rules, rules, rules. Rules are everywhere and can't be avoided. We need them, because if we didn't have them, there would be chaos everywhere. We would destroy ourselves in a flash if we didn't have the rules, regulations, admonitions, instructions, warnings, legislations, guidelines, commandments, holy canons, and the like to keep us in line, to teach us how to behave ourselves:

The Ten Commandments

The Scriptural precepts:

“Love your enemies.” “Do good to them that persecute you.” Pray unceasingly.” “Keep the Sabbath.”
“Keep the traditions.”

Do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that.

Even nature has rules for itself:

A virgin cannot give birth to a child.

The mother of a child cannot be a virgin.

Without a flotation device, a man cannot walk on the surface of the water.

The dead cannot come to life again.

Etc., etc., etc.

In his interpretation of the Gospel of Saint Luke 13:10-17, Saint Cyril of Alexandria asks: Who are all these rules for? — for God or for man? If the rules are for God, then, woe unto us!, says Saint Cyril. If, for example, God were to observe the Sabbath, and His providence and care for creation were to stop and “take a break” on that day, what would happen to everything? The earth would stop rotating on its axis, the atmosphere would dissipate, the oceans would evaporate, worlds would collide. It would be a disaster.

However, thank God, the rules are for *us*, not God. God *makes* the rules. The rules may be strictly applied, or superseded later by better rules, as people mature. The rules may be suspended for a time, if need be. They may be relaxed or changed, depending on the circumstance. God, Who knows and sees all things far better than we do, knows when to apply the pressure, and when to relieve it. Just

The Roman Catholic teacher, Thomas Aquinas, believed that Hades was divided into four compartments: 1) purgatory; 2) the region where the souls of the patriarchs and the righteous of the Old Testament abode; 3) the region for unbaptized children and 4) the region of the eternally damned. Apparently, he felt that Christ descended only to the region of Hades where the souls of the Old Testament righteous dwelt, although Christ's presence was somehow “felt” in the other regions. From this, the saintly Catholicos of Georgia, Bessarion the Wonderworker (+1737), drew the conclusion that the Latins did not *really* believe that Christ had descended into Hades, since they did not understand that Hades was still open, that, as yet, there was no final condemnation or damnation, not until the Last Judgment. So, in the eighteenth century, he wrote the dissertation, “Against the Latins Who Say That Christ Did Not Descend Into Eternal Hades.” At one point in his work, Catholicos Bessarion writes the following:

So who were they that did not believe? The Light Unapproachable descended to those held captive in Hades, in the darkness and shadow of death, and He preached to the dead, as we saw in what was said by the Apostle Peter. Those who were entirely darkened with unbelief did *not* receive His coming, neither confess His Divinity nor bend their knees.

[We affirm also that] the great Abraham did not need preaching, neither did Isaac and Jacob, nor Noah and Job, nor any other of the Prophets and the Just, because they already foresaw His coming, and also His descent to them into Hades. So why would they need preaching, or how would they fail to recognize His coming to them? But He Himself says, “I am come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” and, there in Hades also, He descended to call the sinners and He preached to them. . . .

And it is not surprising that Christ the Master, Who suffered death for men, should have redeemed by His Blood not only

those worthy of mercy, but also those who were unworthy. *For He granted this power even to His servants, that they should deliver from Hades the ungodly and lawless*, as Saint Gregory the Great did the ungodly and lawless emperor Trajan, and as the First Woman Martyr Thecla did for the daughter, Falconilla; and also Saint George, and Saint Macarius, who brought forth from Hades the priests of the idols. . . .

As for you, sons of the Catholic Church, who are established and built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, at whose head is Christ Jesus, the Chosen Stone and the Rock of Life, do not abandon this foundation, neither transgress the boundaries set by the Fathers, that we may be heirs of eternal life, through Christ Jesus, our God, to Whom is due all glory, honour and worship, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

So, according to these texts, just as Christ proclaimed the Good Tidings to the souls in Hades, and those who believed were delivered from suffering, in like manner did the Saints, by the power invested in them by Christ, deliver the souls in Hades in the centuries after His descent into Hades.

Just as Christ came to Hades “to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance,” so also did He give this authority to the Saints to call, by their prayers, the errant souls in Hades to repentance, so that they might believe and — if they chose rightly — be delivered from their suffering. But all of this is a result of God’s boundless and ineffable mercy.

As monastics, we have heard these narratives for years in the monastery vigils and at the refectory readings, and it was only in response to a pastoral inquiry that we proceeded to set down in writing what had been brought to our attention from these sacred texts. As Orthodox Christians, we must be aware that this is what the

Church has taught and believed for centuries. Certainly, these are issues we must consider when we reflect upon God’s plan for the salvation of mankind.



THE RULES

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

It was Autumn in 1987, and we were in a tourist bus heading for the shrine of Saint John the Russian on the island of Euboia, Greece. Euboia is a very large island, about 100 miles long, lying off the coast of Attica, and washed by the deep blue waters of the Aegean Sea.

We had just arrived from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and now were visiting some holy sites in Greece.

Our bus driver, George (I will never forget his name), was at the wheel, and we were approaching an intersection, where the bus came to a stop. Everyone who was on the left side in the bus could clearly see the two traffic signs that were on their side. One sign said: ONE WAY — DO NOT ENTER. The other read: NO BUSES ALLOWED.

After a momentary pause at the intersection, George began making a left turn the wrong way into the one-way street. Everybody on the left side of the bus erupted into a shout, “George, what are you doing?! This is a one way street! And it says, ‘No buses allowed’!!”

George reassuringly lifted his arm, and calmly said, “Fathers! Relax!! In Greece, all these laws are optional!”

(Which makes you wonder: how can anyone govern these people??)

